

Public Health Update Pertussis

August 8, 2012

The Southern Nevada Health District continues to see an increase in pertussis cases throughout the Valley. As of July 28, a total of 30 cases have been reported since January. Seven of these cases have occurred in children less than one year of age. The health district reported 20 cases in 2011. The epidemiological investigation of cases has not linked patients who are not living in the same household directly to one another, which could mean the illness is circulating in the community and is under-reported. Nationwide, through July 28, more than twice the number of cases were reported over the same time period in 2011.

The Southern Nevada Health District is advising parents and caregivers who bring their children to the health district to update their pertussis vaccinations, especially adults who care for or live with infants. In addition, a technical bulletin has been distributed to physicians and health care providers to consider pertussis and test for it when patients appear symptomatic. The health district is advising people in the community to receive the vaccine as it is the most effective way to prevent the spread of pertussis to those most at risk of severe illness.

Older children and adults should receive a single dose of pertussis-containing tetanus vaccine (Tdap) if they have not previously received one. The Tdap vaccination is especially important for children older than age 11 and adults who live with or care for infants. The Tdap vaccine prevents the illness in 70 percent to 90 percent of those who receive it. There is no minimum waiting time between receiving a regular tetanus booster (Td) and getting the Tdap vaccination. It is recommended that pregnant women be vaccinated with Tdap after reaching 20 weeks gestation.

Pertussis is a very contagious, bacterial respiratory disease. Although it might be a mild disease in older children and adults, in younger children and infants it can result in hospitalization due to complications including severe respiratory distress and inflammation of the brain. In rare cases, pertussis can cause death, especially in children less than one year of age. Adherence to the recommended immunization schedule for children is the most important way to provide protection. Infants must receive their first doses of pertussis vaccine at two months, and again at four months, six months and between 15 and 18 months. A fifth dose of DTaP is required prior to school entry and a Tdap booster is required for children entering 7th grade.

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Children and adults who are partially protected by the vaccine can have a milder illness than infants and very young children, however, they can still transmit the disease to others, including infants too young to be immunized. Prompt use of antibiotics in a household is helpful in limiting other cases.

The disease can occur at any age, but it is most commonly reported in children during the first year of life. Infants and young children usually get the disease from an older sibling or from an adult who has a mild case of the illness. The bacteria are spread in the air by droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. Once a person is exposed, it takes seven to 10 days before the first symptoms appear. Symptoms of pertussis usually occur in stages, with the initial stage appearing like a cold with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and a cough, which lasts one to two weeks before it worsens. The second stage of the disease includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by the “whooping” sound a person makes when he breathes in. Infants younger than six months might have a cough that does not include the “whooping” sound. During the severe coughing spells, vomiting may occur, or the person’s lips or face might look blue due to a lack of oxygen. The second stage can last four to six weeks, if untreated.

Updated information about the Southern Nevada Health District can be found on Facebook www.facebook.com/SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict, on YouTube www.youtube.com/SNHealthDistrict or Twitter: www.twitter.com/SNHDinfo. The health district is now available in Spanish on Twitter www.twitter.com/TuSNHD. Don’t have a Twitter account? Follow the health district on your phone by texting “follow SNHDinfo” to 40404.